

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 02549 241507Z

53

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7086

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 2549

E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, IN

SUBJECT: JUTE STRIKE ENDS

GVFDEC NEW DELHI 2121

1. ON FEBRUARY 21 THE 46-DAY STRIKE OF 250,000 JUTE WORKERS IN WEST BENGAL WAS FORMALLY CALLED OFF BY INTUC, WHICH HAD ALSO INITIATED THE STRIKE. THE AITUC, THE HMS, AND THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS JOINED THE INTUC IN CALLING FOR A RETURN TO WORK. THE CITU AND UTUC FOLLOWED A DAY LATER, ACCUSING THE INTUC AND THE AITUC OF BETRAYING THE WORKERS.

2. THE STRIKE WAS CALLED OFF AFTER THE GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL AND THE INDUSTRY REFUSED TO IMPROVE UPON THE "LAST OFFER" WHICH, INTER ALIA, PROVIDED FOR RS. 120 AS AN AD HOC PAYMENT TO "DEFRAY SPECIAL EXPENSES," A DEVISE TO AVOID IMPOUNDING THE INCREASE UNDER THE COMPULSORY DEPOSIT SCHEME.

3. AS OF FEBRUARY 24 WORK IS REPORTEDLY BACK TO NORMAL. EVEN BEFORE THE STRIKE WAS CALLED OFF, THE MILLS WERE

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 02549 241507Z

REOPENED WITH SUBSTANTIAL WORKER ATTENDANCE.

4. COMMENT: DESPITE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE JUTE INDUSTRY AS THE PRINCIPAL EARNER OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE FOR INDIA, THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT DID NOT INTERVENE TO END THE WORK STOPPAGE, DESPITE DEMANDS IN PARLIAMENT THAT IT DO SO. RATHER THE MATTER WAS LEFT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL WHICH PURSUED A POLICY OF ALLOWING THE STRIKE TO DIE ITS OWN NATURAL DEATH, WHICH IT DID. THROUGHOUT THE STRIKE THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS, SOME OF WHICH WERE CARRIED IN PRESS EDITORIALS, THAT THERE WAS COLLUSION BETWEEN MANAGEMENT AND LABOR IN PROMOTING THE STRIKE. THE INDUSTRY ALLEGEDLY HAD EXCESS INVENTORY, AND A STRIKE ALLOWED A REDUCTION IN PRODUCTION WITHOUT LIABILITY FOR LAY-OFF PAY (50 PERCENT OF WAGES). WHILE THERE MAY BE SOME TRUTH TO THIS STORY, THE GENESIS OF THE STRIKE WOULD APPEAR TO LIE MORE IN THE INTUC'S DESIRE TO RECOUP ITS STANDING AMONG JUTE WORKERS WITH WHOM IT HAD BEEN DISCREDITED FOLLOWING THE UNSUCCESSFUL JANUARY 1974 STRIKE. THE FIASCO OF THIS LATEST EFFORT WILL FURTHER WEAKEN THE INTUC, NOT ONLY IN THE JUTE INDUSTRY BUT PROBABLY IN WEST BENGAL GENERALLY. THAT THE GOI DID NOT INTERVENE FORCEFULLY TO LIMIT THE STRIKE MAY PARTIALLY BE DUE TO THE FACT THAT IT WAS THE CONGRESS-ALIGNED INTUC WHICH SPEARHEADED THE STRIKE. AT THE REQUEST OF THE GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL (CONGRESS R) THE MATTER WAS LEFT ENTIRELY TO THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CHIEF MINISTER AND LABOR MINISTER OF WEST BENGAL AND THE INTUC STRIKE LEADERS HAVE NOT BEEN GOOD FOR SOME TIME, AND THE STATE OFFICIALS WERE THEREFORE OF NO HELP TO THE INTUC IN SALVAGING ITS PRESTIGE FROM THE DEBRIS OF THE STRIKE.

SCHNEIDER

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